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DEPARTMENT FOR PA, NEA/ARN, INR/IC/CD, INR/S:STHIBEAULT AND
JMCARTER, VOA NEWS CA, NEA/PPD:CBURGEOIS, DBENZE AND
AFERNANDEZ, IIP/G/NEA-SA RWINCHESTER
WHITE HOUSE FOR NSC
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E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: Damascus Media Reaction: Terrorism, US/Israel,
Syria/Iraq, Lebanon (5/5-7)

11. Summary: Papers reported that Syria has called for an international conference to distinguish between terrorism and the right of self-determination. Minister of Interior General Bassam Abdul Majid said in a statement on the sidelines of a conference of Interior Ministers of the EU and Adjacent Countries, which ended last night in Vienna, that it was necessary to look deep into the roots of terrorism and to tackle it in a rational way. He added that Syria's participation in such an event reflects its real interest in regional and international cooperation to confront the problem of terrorism in all its forms. The Conference ended with adoption of a draft declaration containing a set of principles and proposals on fighting terrorism, organized crime, corruption, human trafficking and illegal immigration.

Two editorials in government-owned Tishreen (5/6) criticized President Bush's remarks about Israel and HAMAS in his May 4 speech to the AIPAC centennial dinner. The paper maintained that "the current US Administration cannot be a friend, a neutral party, or a judge in anything related to the Arab region. Rather, it is Israel's willing partner in the hostility and aggression against the Arabs and all the struggling peoples who defend their freedom, sovereignty, and independence."

Government-owned Al-Ba'th on (5/5) reported that Iraqi President Jalal Talabani, in a statement issued by his office, denied media reports that had cited him saying Syria is the main source of support for the insurgents in Iraq. The statement said Talabani told a group of journalists that he considers himself a friend of Syria and refuses to create problems with it.

Papers reported a speech by Hasan Nasrallah, SecGen of Hizbollah, lashing out at the so-called March 14 Forces, saying that they did not really want to demarcate Lebanon's borders with Syria but are looking to disarm Hizbollah. Nasrallah said that Lebanese parties have agreed that ties with Syria are excellent due to historical relations and the Taif Accord. He questioned the commitment of most of the March 14 Forces, and therefore of the Lebanese government, to decisions of the national dialogue about the Syrian-Lebanese file, asserting that there are those who are committed to enmity with Syria who are searching for every issue, large and small, to continue provocations between the two countries. "Raising any problem about the borders with Syria is shameful...", Nasrallah said.

On (5/5) Papers reported that President Lahoud received a delegation of Palestinian factions. Lahoud reiterated the necessity of acknowledging the Palestinian refugees' right of return, warning that settling Palestinians in Lebanon would mean the end of the Palestinian cause. He stressed that security and stability in the region will not be achieved without a just and comprehensive peace that guarantees the Palestinian right of return and restores all occupied Arab territories.

End of summary.

12. Selected Headlines:

"Conference of Interior Ministers of the EU and Neighboring Countries concludes deliberations in Vienna with the participation of Bassam Abdul Majid, Syrian Minister of Interior. Syria Calls for an international conference to define terrorism" (Government-owned Tishreen, 5/7)

"Washington exerts pressures on the Quartet to prolong siege on Palestinians. Mahmoud Abbas, Head of the Palestinian Authority, discusses the financial crisis and sharing authority with Ismail Hanieh, Palestinian Prime Minister" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 5/7)

"Six Palestinians martyred in Gaza and Nablus. Olmert is to meet Bush on May 21. No date has been set for meeting Abbas. Sweden grants an entry visa to a Palestinian Minister. Israel denounces it" (Government-owned Tishreen, 5/6)

"Washington and Israel block financial aid to the Palestinian Authority" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 5/5)

"The Knesset approves the Israeli cabinet. Hamas considers Olmert program a declaration of war. Abbas calls for negotiations" (Government-owned Al-Ba'th, 5/5)

"President Lahoud: The resistance deters Israel from launching aggression against us. Lebanese figures and parties denounce some parties' fabrication of troubles to sabotage continued endeavors to normalize relations with Syria" (Government-owned Tishreen, 5/6)

"Nasrallah, SecGen of Hizbollah: Raising any border problem with Syria is shameful" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 5/5)

"Talabani of Iraq denies statements attributed to him on Syria" (Government-owned Al-Ba'th, 5/5)

"Calls for speeding up formation of the Iraqi government continue. Three US soldiers killed in Babel. CNN: 2415 American soldiers have been killed in Iraq" (Government-owned Tishreen, 5/6)

"Three US soldiers killed in Baghdad. 13 Iraqis victimized by US shelling of Al-Ramadi" (Government-owned Al-Ba'th, 5/5)

"A British military helicopter crashes in Basra, and a US helicopter in Afghanistan" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 5/7)

"First Iranian Vice President voices readiness to put Iran's expertise in Syria's hands" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 5/5)

13. Editorial Block Quotes:

"Drowning in Shame"

Isam Dari, an editorialist in government-owned Tishreen, commented (5/6): "In his May 4th speech to the AIPAC centennial dinner, President Bush asserted that his country's commitment to Israel's security is unshakable and that Washington will not deal with HAMAS unless it recognizes Israel. Bush' statement was not surprising....

"But Bush deserves to be thanked for his statements: He gave us

yet another document about the real nature of American policy, which is based, simply, on sanctifying force and terror, censoring resistance, and fighting and humiliating nations....

"Bush gave us conclusive evidence that US Administrations say things that they do not mean and adopt practical policies that conflict with their ideal slogans, such as democracy, which was rejected when HAMAS won the confidence of the Palestinian people, and freedom, which was contradicted when the United States occupied Afghanistan and Iraq, and human rights, which were violated in Guantanamo, Abu Ghurayb, and the flying and fixed prisons in various countries, including some in Europe....

"The current US Administration cannot be a friend, a neutral party, or a judge in anything related to the Arab region. Rather, it is Israel's willing partner in the hostility and aggression against the Arabs and all the struggling peoples who defend their freedom, sovereignty, and independence.

"We know that the United States is committed to the security of the only power that threatens the security and stability of the region and practices terrorism around the clock. And we know that the strongest superpower in today's world is hostile to HAMAS, Syria, Iran, Lebanon, and all the Arabs because it wants to please Israel and encourage the Zionist plan. We know that the Bush administration is nothing but a tool in the hands of

the Zionist lobby and Israel, implementing pure Israeli policies and willing to antagonize the American taxpayer himself in return for the approval of Tel Aviv's leaders.

"The Bush administration has the right to do whatever pleases it and Israel. But it has no right, from now on, to claim that it is the champion of freedom, democracy, and human rights."

"Commitment or Crime"

Hanan Hamad, a commentator in government-owned Tishreen, wrote (5/6): "We wonder if commitment to Israel's security means the annihilation of the Palestinians....

"US support for Israel is nothing new, but it has reached a peak with the attempt to besiege and starve the Palestinian people and block all their channels of survival through a systematic and programmed policy to push them toward one of two options: Qnnihilation or displacement....

"President Bush has called on HAMAS to lay down its arms and recognize Israel.... The American president ignores Israel's ceaseless killings of Palestinians and turns a blind eye to all the measures that Israel is unilaterally taking to impose a racist, colonialist, and occupational fait accompli on the Palestinians...."

"The Olmert Government and a Tendency Toward Introversion"

Ahmad Sawwan, a commentator in government-owned Tishreen, wrote (5/6): "The Israeli government's plan for unilateral withdrawal from parts of the West Bank seeks to impose more facts on the ground that conflict radically with the peace process and to complicate the situation further in an escalatory and explosive direction....

"The plan constitutes a declaration of war on the Palestinian territories, the Palestinian people, and the peace process....

"Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert's endeavor to secure American support for the plan is a forewarning that if Washington supports the plan, it will be pushing the situation, not only in the Palestinian territories but also in the entire region, toward the brink of an abyss....

"The only solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict lies in a full Israeli withdrawal from the Palestinian territories, to the 4 June 1967 border...."

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"Distinguished US-Israeli Product"
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Muhammad Ali Buzah, an editorialist in government-owned Al-Thawra, commented (5/5): "The US State Department report on terrorism is a politically motivated report in which Washington levels accusations against certain countries that resist American and Israeli plans. The report is part of the culture of hate, hostility, and political classification..., and it seeks to divert attention from the atrocities and crimes that Washington and Tel Aviv commit in this region and the rest of the world through wars of invasion, interference, usurpation, and confiscation of nations' wills, freedoms, and independence...."

"While the US Administration legitimizes mass killings in Iraq, Palestine, and Afghanistan, it labels as terrorism every form of resistance, rejection, and confrontation.

"The United States has no right to make unsubstantiated accusations or punish anyone, because terrorism is an American-Israeli industry par excellence...."

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"Criticism that is a Compliment"
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Izz-al-Din al-Darwish, an editorialist in government-owned Tishreen, wrote (5/5): "The merchants of politics in Lebanon place themselves at the service of the American media campaign against Syria and arrange show meetings to provoke Damascus, in return for a handful of dollars, a promise to meet an American official, or a certificate of good conduct from the Israeli prime minister's office...."

"These people do not recognize that homelands are sacred, and that dealing with them as commodities for sale amounts to high treason.... The people will never forgive these merchants and will not remain silent forever. As for Syria, its right is guaranteed, and everyone knows that their insults to it are, in fact -- as far as all others are concerned - compliments for Syria."

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